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1 October 1965

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Rhodesian Independence: Background and Consequences

Summary

1. The Rhodesian Government appears to be forcing an early showdown with Britain on the long-disputed issue of Rhodesian independence. Prime Minister Ian Smith's cabinet is determined to achieve independence from the UK under the present constitution, which would prolong white rule in Rhodesia indefinitely. The UK is committed to refusing independence until definite provision is made for eventual African majority rule. Smith is scheduled to meet with Prime Minister Harold Wilson in London on 7 October, and has made it clear that these talks must determine whether Rhodesia will achieve negotiated independence or declare it unilaterally. Smith is to arrive in London on 4 October to hold preliminary meetings with Commonwealth Relations officials; three of his cabinet ministers are already in London and another will accompany him next week. Although Wilson will attempt to deter Smith from a unilateral declaration of independence (UDI) by spelling out political and economic sanctions which the UK would take against a rebellious Rhodesia, British officials are pessimistic and believe that Rhodesia will declare its independence before the end of October.

Background

2. Rhodesia has complete internal self-government, with its own legislature, army, air force, and police, all of which are firmly controlled by approximately 225,000 whites--outnumbered by the African population of almost 4 million. Although nominally a British colony, Rhodesia has never been governed directly from London. It was colonized, developed, and administered by Cecil Rhodes' British South African Company until 1923, when the white settlers chose to form a

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self-governing colony--then Southern Rhodesia--under the British Crown. Although Britain retained the right to intervene in the colony's affairs, particularly over legislation affecting Africans, this power was never exercised. In 1953, largely at the insistence of Rhodesian whites, the UK agreed to federate Southern Rhodesia and the two British protectorates of Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland. Although the Federation was an economic success, it failed because of fierce opposition from the Africans, particularly in the two protectorates, who believed that they would never rule themselves within the white-dominated federal structure. It was formally dissolved in 1963, following which Nyasaland and Northern Rhodesia became independent as Malawi and Zambia, with African-run governments.

3. Since then, the white electorate of Rhodesia has become obsessed with the necessity of achieving its own independence and of preserving white control indefinitely. Although the Rhodesian Constitution of 1961 provides for some African representation in the Legislative Assembly--at most 15 out of 65 seats--the Africans have no effective voice in Rhodesian politics. Successive nationalist parties have been outlawed and their leaders placed in restriction or forced to flee into exile. A battery of security laws makes it extremely difficult for the nationalists to organize. Rhodesia has never officially expressed a desire to follow the extreme apartheid racial policies of its neighbor, the Republic of South Africa, although a vocal minority has proposed policies akin to apartheid. Nevertheless, whenever the white electorate has suspected its government of making concessions to the Africans, that government has fallen and been replaced by leadership even more firmly determined to maintain the white Rhodesian "way of life" under an independent government.

4. The electorate's determination to achieve independence under a white-dominated government has pressed Smith into his present confrontation with the British. Smith became Prime Minister in 1964 when his ruling Rhodesia Front party removed from office a man whom its militant majority felt was moving too slowly toward independence. Smith is undoubtedly well

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aware that the same fate could befall him. He has promised the voters--who gave him overwhelming support in elections last May--that he would achieve independence. He has often threatened to declare independence unilaterally and apparently backed away from this drastic action last year only because of the threat of UK sanctions and dire warnings from the Rhodesian business community of what those sanctions would mean. Instead, he followed the course of negotiating a gradual independence from the UK. With the past month, however, pressure from within the Rhodesia Front party and from the white electorate has risen to an all-time high, and Smith appears to have decided that it will be politically impossible to delay the acquisition of independence any longer.

5. The UK, under severe pressure from non-white members of the Commonwealth to hold a firm line with Smith, continues to refuse independence unless provision is made for eventual majority rule. For over two years both Tory and Labor governments has attempted to avoid a showdown and Wilson will undoubtedly attempt to frighten Smith into backing off in their upcoming talks. British officials fear that Wilson will fail, however, and the UK will be faced with the need to carry out its threats and impose some sanctions.

**British Policy**

3. London has done little to specify, either publicly or privately, what actions it would take. Probably few decisions have been taken. Arms exports to Rhodesia would be banned; Britain's limited economic aid would cease; Rhodesia probably would be excluded from the London money market and lose trade preferences. More serious measures being contemplated include a ban on imports of Rhodesia sugar and tobacco--the key items in Rhodesia's trade with Britain, a comprehensive trade embargo, the blocking of Rhodesian sterling assets, and the exclusion of Rhodesia from the sterling area.

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7. However, harsh economic measures would create economic and political difficulties for Britain. Loss of Rhodesia trade would damage Britain's precarious balance of payments--the UK has a payments surplus with Rhodesia. London fears that the Smith government might retaliate by striking at vulnerable Zambia. Quite aside from British feelings of responsibility for Zambian welfare, Britain imports about 50 percent of its copper from Zambia, and it has been estimated that loss of these supplies could throw some 10,000 Britons out of work. The Labor Government, with a 3-vote margin in Parliament, is uncertain of support from its voters--many of whom have personal and family ties with white Rhodesians--in taking severe measures.

8. On the other hand, failure to react vigorously to a UDI could bring withdrawal of at least some non-white members of the Commonwealth--destroying the Commonwealth in its present form, and jeopardize what remains of British influence in the rest of Africa and Asia. British officials also fear that failure to react could cause anti-British, and even general anti-Western, demonstrations in some African states.

9. Diplomatically, the UK would exert all of the pressure at its command, and would probably call on other Commonwealth and NATO allies to do likewise. London would announce the dismissal of Smith, stop all dealings with the Rhodesian government, withdraw the bulk of its staff in Salisbury, and appeal to Rhodesian citizens to remain loyal to the Queen. Military action against Rhodesia has been emphatically ruled out, and UK officials are warning African Commonwealth members against participating in other paramilitary operations.

Rhodesian Bastion

10. Only severe and sustained economic reprisals by Britain and other Commonwealth countries would seriously damage an independent Rhodesia. Its economy is well-developed and diversified. A broad program of economic sanctions would cause confusion and a general slowdown, however. One problem would be finding new markets to compensate for the 31 percent of foreign earnings derived from tobacco sales, if Britain

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bars tobacco. Loss of access to the London money market would exacerbate existing problems of obtaining private foreign investment but South African facilities would help fill the gap. African laborers in the cash economy would probably be the first to feel any cutbacks, and Smith might consider repatriating the 45,000 Zambians employed in Rhodesia. In the unlikely event of a total embargo imposed by the entire Commonwealth and other Western nations for a year or more, the pinch would become severe.

11. Although the African nationalists have threatened massive uprisings in the event of UDI, internal security problems would probably be minimal. While some sporadic violence and sabotage might occur, all top African nationalist leaders have been interned by the government, the two main African political parties are in exile and have been wrangling among themselves, and the African population within Rhodesia is generally cowed. Most observers are convinced that the Rhodesian security forces can and will maintain internal security. Smith has reshuffled some of his top security officials to ensure their loyalty to his government. Rhodesia has a 3,000 man army (including 1,000 Africans), and an 800 man (all-white) air force with 52 jets and 17 propellor aircraft. In addition there is a police force of 5,100 (including 1,500 whites). An active white reserve ground element of 4,000-6,000 could be called up on short notice. To date the African members of the army and police have followed orders from their white superiors, even when directed to take action against fellow Africans.

12. Prime Minister Smith has been developing closer ties with Rhodesia's white-dominated neighbors, the Republic of South Africa and the Portuguese territories of Angola and Mozambique, and would hope for their support in the event of a UDI. In the past year, Rhodesia has signed trade agreements with South Africa and Portugal, high-level visits exchanged among the three governments have been frequent, and intelligence liaison has grown closer. Rhodesia recently established

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an independent representative in Lisbon, over the violent objections of the UK, and already has representatives in Mozambique and South Africa. Both governments would probably give Smith some diplomatic support, and South Africa could probably be counted on for economic assistance, and an alternative money market. In the unlikely event of an African invasion of Rhodesia, or widespread subversive efforts, South Africa has implied that military assistance would be available, according to a high Rhodesian official. Both Portugal and South Africa, however, have troubles of their own which would limit the amount of help they could provide.

Other Repercussions

13. A UDI would place Zambia's moderate President Kenneth Kaunda in a deep dilemma. The breakup of the Federation left Zambia with close economic ties to its southern neighbor. Zambia's copper industry, for example, which generates an export income of about \$415 million annually and accounts for almost half of Zambia's gross domestic product, depends almost exclusively on coal and electric power from Rhodesia, as well as on the rail routes through Rhodesia to the Indian Ocean. Although the Portuguese may permit Zambia more extensive use of the Benguela Railroad through Angola to the port of Lobito, which might partially replace the Rhodesian routes, this has not been decided.

14. Kaunda has followed a policy of restraining the militant Rhodesian nationalists who have taken refuge in Zambia. UDI would put him under severe pressure from domestic and external African sources to sponsor a Rhodesian nationalist government-in-exile and to permit the use of Zambia as the prime staging area for paramilitary operations against Rhodesia. Kaunda's latest responses to the mounting UDI threat indicate that he will ostensibly support collective action measures proposed by the Commonwealth, the OAU, or the United Nations, but will attempt, insofar as is politically possible, to avoid any concrete measures which might provoke crippling economic reprisals from Rhodesia. Smith would prefer to avoid taking reprisals which, for his part, probably could disrupt Rhodesia's valuable trade with Zambia.

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15. The Organization of African Unity (OAU) might respond to UDI by pulling out all the verbal stops--a special conference and angry resolutions calling for recognition of a Rhodesian nationalist government-in-exile and support for a war of liberation. (An OAU summit meeting is already scheduled for 21 October) In May, the OAU's African Liberation Committee reportedly adopted secret recommendations to the OAU that all members be asked to contribute arms and troops for joint intervention in the event of a UDI; that Zambia be asked to accommodate the OAU task force; and that Zambia meanwhile be asked to accommodate irregular freedom fighters. Actual implementation of such a plan would be impossible unless Zambia agreed. Even if Kaunda were forced to agree, or were overthrown in the chaos, the limited finances and organizational abilities of the OAU would make such paramilitary operations of only limited effectiveness against superior Rhodesian security forces. The ALC's recommendations reflect the fiery attitude of such states as Tanzania, safely beyond the range of feasible retaliation by white Rhodesia.

16. The United Nations majority would respond to a UDI with expressions of strong disapproval, and might pass resolutions calling for specific sanctions such as an arms embargo. There would probably be some pressure from radical African and Communist states for military intervention, but General Assembly or Security Council approval of such action is unlikely. The Security Council last May called on the UK to deny independence to Rhodesia under white rule, a resolution on which the United States as well as the UK abstained. A divergence of views between the UK and African Commonwealth members would raise a dilemma for the United States in the UN.

US Policy and Interest

17. US policy on Rhodesia, which was reaffirmed by Assistant Secretary Williams last week, is essentially to let Britain take the lead, using its own limited leverage to buttress British efforts to find a peaceful solution which is based on a clear prospect of early majority rule. The US is investigating the possibility of joint economic sanctions with the UK. The US has turned down some Rhodesian requests for military equipment, and it has been made clear to Smith that we would not recognize a UDI.

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18. US investment in Rhodesia totals about \$53 million, much of which is concentrated in chrome and copper mining. Rhodesia is the largest supplier of chrome to the US, and American companies control most of the chrome production. Considerable US capital is also invested in tobacco marketing, and a wide variety of other US companies have Rhodesian subsidiaries. The American community numbers about 2,000.

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# AFRICA



ADMINISTRATIVE DIVISIONS  
APRIL 1965

★ Capital

□ Non-independent area

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